



Towards Operationalizing the RUFORUM Regional Hubs: First Virtual Meeting of RUFORUM Member Universities in Western Africa and in French Speaking Countries of Central and Northern Africa

Concept Note

Anglophone Workshop

Contacts

Prof Achille Assogbadjo, UAC Benin | Email: assogbadjo@yahoo.fr

Dr. Sokona Dagnoko, RUFORUM | Email: s.dagnoko@ruforum.org

Context and Background

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a continental network that supports higher education institutions in mission delivery to strengthen their contributions to agricultural development and innovation in Africa. The network grew from its base in East and Southern Africa to cover three other regions of the continent i.e., Central Africa, Northern Africa and Western Africa. This growth encompasses all major working languages of the African Union (Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Kiswahili). Currently, RUFORUM uses four of the African Union Commission (AUC) working languages i.e., Arabic, English, French, Portuguese that are also used as languages of Instruction across its members in 40 countries. Currently, 20 universities in Central Africa, 65 in Eastern Africa, 6 in Northern Africa, 53 in Southern Africa, and 31 in Western Africa are members of the RUFORUM Network. The higher education systems across the RUFORUM network are also different and there is need to gain deeper clarity on their structure, missions and operations in order to provide contextualized support by the Secretariat. This is the basis of the proposed meeting. It also underpins creation of Regional Operation Hubs. By engaging different education systems under its membership, underpinned by main languages of instruction, differences will be leveraged to enhance convergence and cross learning.

Accordingly, the RUFORUM Board approved in 2021 in Cotonou, the establishment of a Regional Hub in Benin to support coordination of Network activities in West Africa, by bringing together both French and English speaking countries of the Network. In May 2024, RUFORUM signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of the Republic of Benin to support establishment of the RUFORUM West Africa Regional Hub. A similar arrangement has also been done for Malawi that will host the Southern Africa Hub. Using the regional hubs, RUFORUM will increase its footprint across Africa, its member universities, countries and regions of the network and enhance coordination and synergy in agricultural higher education across the continent.

Rationale

Member universities in Africa and in the targeted regions of the West Africa Regional Hub in particular are confronted with numerous challenges, including:

- o Outdated curricula: not adapted for producing graduates with 21st century skills and knowledge
- o High unemployment rates among graduates: With a Youth NEET (Not in Employment, Education and Training), rate of 19.2% in 2023 for Western Africa ¹. Equally worrisome is level of unemployment and the quality jobs available for young people, the majority of such jobs being “insecure jobs.”
- o Relevance of Curricula and Research: Weak alignment between research outputs and community needs often triggered by weak university – community linkage, and weak technology transfer capacities of universities.
- o Financing: Limited funding for research and innovation.
- o Outreach: Insufficient partnerships with public and private actors.
- o Business Skills: Gaps in entrepreneurship training and opportunities.
- o Business creation: Inadequacy in the number and quality of agribusiness incubation hubs.

The creation of the RUFORUM West Africa Regional Hub presents a timely opportunity for member Universities to dive deep into the above challenges to identify specificities and priority issues in the countries covered by the hub, and design tailored solutions, under the coordination of the RUFORUM Secretariat. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for university stakeholders to take ownership of RUFORUM's mission locally, deepen their engagement in the network and shape a collaborative response to these challenges. Whereas the government supports to create regional hubs have been given, there is need for creating convergence on operational themes, engagement with stakeholders in the wider higher agricultural education and research for development ecosystems. This meeting aims to start discussions and develop a roadmap towards the formal launch of the regional nodes.

Purpose

The purpose of this event is to engage member university leaders from Francophone and Anglophone Western, Northern and Central Africa in discussions around operationalization modalities of the RUFORUM Regional Hubs in view to better serve the membership.

Main Objective

The main objective of this virtual event is to initiate a strategic dialogue among the targeted RUFORUM member universities and other key stakeholders around the key challenges of agricultural higher education institutions in the targeted regions and operationalization modalities of the newly established regional hub in Benin, West Africa.

Specific Objectives

1. Discuss how to improve collaboration amongst member universities within the targeted sub regions around teaching, learning, research and outreach.
2. Discuss expectations of universities and other stakeholders from the Regional Hubs.
3. Discuss on the kind of support expected from RUFORUM Secretariat and how to implement them at sub regional levels and across the region (Continent).
4. Start discussions and develop a roadmap towards the operationalization of the hub.
5. Engage actors in a participatory dialogue on the official launching of the Regional Hub's in Gaborone at the 21st RUFORUM AGM scheduled to take place in the first week of December in Botswana.

Conveners:

This meeting is co-convened by the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) and the Government of the Republic of Benin.

Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM): RUFORUM is a Pan-African network of 175 predominantly agriculture teaching and research universities found in 40 countries of the continent that was established in 2004. For details visit (www.ruforum.org).

Government of Benin: The Government of Benin, through its Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (<https://enseignementsuperieur.gouv.bj/>) signed in May 2024, a

¹https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Sub-Saharan%20Africa%20GET%20Youth%202024_0.pdf

Memorandum of Understanding with RUFORUM for establishing a RUFORUM regional hub that will service West Africa member universities and all French-speaking universities of the RUFORUM network.

Workshop Approach and methodology

This meeting will be held as a facilitated virtual event. There will be two different workshops, the Francophone workshop and the Anglophone workshop to be held back to back. Each workshop will have four sessions as follows:

- **Session 1:** Opening ceremony
- **Session 2:** Scene setting and plenary discussions
- **Session 3:** Moderated Panel discussions

During this session, the floor will be given to one representative of each sub-region (Western, Northern and Central Africa) and one representative of the hub host country (Benin) to share their perspectives, best practices, imperatives, challenges, opportunities and future prospects on the six issues raised under specific objectives. Other issues such as university contributing to digital economy, National Innovation Systems / national economic development processes, Universities and private sector linkage and University and Community engagement / technology transfer will be discussed.

There will be opportunity for open-discussions as well.

The aim is to engage stakeholders in debates, to capture the contributions, ideas and perspectives of the participants on the priority issues and imperatives on the above issues in the framework of the operationalization of the regional hub. During the debates, elements for designing a roadmap would be identified, taking into account the peculiarities of each geographic region.

- **Session 4:** The closing ceremony

Expected Outcomes

1. Strategies to improve collaboration amongst member universities within the targeted sub regions (Central Africa, Western Africa, and Northern Africa) around teaching, learning, research and out-reach developed.
2. Expectations of Universities' leadership from the regional hubs clarified.
3. Support expected from RUFORUM secretariat and how to implement them at sub regional levels and across the region (Continent) clarified.
4. Draft roadmap for operationalizing the Node developed.
5. Shared vision and direction for the official launching of the Regional Hub's in Gaborone at the 21st RUFORUM AGM.

Participants:

Principals and Deans and other representatives of member universities will participate in this event. They include (i) all RUFORUM member universities in Western Africa irrespective of the language, and (ii) Francophone member universities of the network in other regions of Africa (mainly Central and Northern Africa). Key development partners

having interest in the targeted regions / countries will be invited. Representatives of the RUFORUM Secretariat, Resource persons, government officials, private sector, research and extension institutions as well as representatives of Farmers' Organizations will also participate in the meeting.

Date and Venue: This event will be held Online on:

- May 26, 2025 for the Francophone Workshop
- May 28 2025 for the Anglophone Workshop.

Heure :

- Francophone Workshop: 14:00 – 16:00 EAT (11:00 – 13:00 GMT)
 - Anglophone Workshop: 14:00 – 16:00 EAT (11:00 – 13:00 GMT)
-

Tentative Programme of the Workshop

Moderation: Dr. Sokona Dagnoko, RUFORUM

Rapporteurs

- **Lead rapporteurs::** Yamungu Boniface Alongo, and Arfang Badji, RUFORUM
- **Session 1 rapporteurs:** Arfang Badji, David Ekepu, and Evaline Acan, RUFORUM
- **Session 2 rapporteurs:** Yamungu Boniface Alongo, Luise Mwanyangapo and Nada Musa, RUFORUM

| Agenda Item | Timing | Person Responsible |
|--|---------|---|
| SESSION 1: OPENING CEREMONY (30 minutes) | | |
| Session Introduction, context, objectives, and format | 5 mins | Moderator |
| Remarks from RUFORUM Executive Secretary | 6 mins | Prof. Patrick Okori |
| Remarks from the Representative of West Africa Member Universities | 2 mins | TBD |
| Remarks from the Representative of Northern Africa Member Universities | 2 mins | TBD |
| Remarks from the Representative of Central Africa Member Universities | 2 mins | TBD |
| Remarks from the RUFORUM International Advisory panel Representative | 2 mins | Prof. Brice Sinsin, Former Rector, UAC, Benin |
| Remarks from the RUFORUM Deputy Board Chair | 3 mins | Prof. Bruno Djossa, UNA, Bénin |
| Official Opening Remarks | 8 mins | Prof. Félicien Avlessi, Rector of the University Abomey Calavi, Benin |
| SESSION 2: SCENE SETTING (30) | | |
| Keynote Address: Overview of the RUFORUM Regional Hub for West Africa: Current status, Achievements, Challenges and way forward | 10 mins | Prof Achille Assogbadjo, University of Abomey Calavi, Benin |
| Facilitated Plenary Discussions: | 20 mins | Moderator |

SESSION 3: PANEL DISCUSSIONS (40 minutes)

| | | |
|---|---------|---|
| Moderated Panel discussions: Strengthening collaboration amongst Agricultural Higher Education Institutions in CA, NA, and WA for training the requisite Human Capital capable for the 21st Century job market: Approaches, best practices, Imperatives, Challenges, and opportunities in the framework of the RUFORUM Regional Hubs and continental development priorities | 35 mins | <p>Moderator: Dr Sokona Dagnoko, RUFORUM</p> <p>Panelist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative from Benin • Representative from Central Africa • Representative from Northern Africa • Representatives from Western Africa |
| Open Floor | 5 mins | Moderator |

SESSION 4: CLOSING CEREMONY (10 MINUTES)

| | | |
|------------------------|----------|--|
| Workshop Summary | 5 mins | Moderator |
| Closing remarks | 5 mins | Prof. Patrick Okori, Executive Secretary (RUFORUM) |
| Total time for session | 120 mins | |